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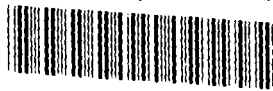
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Sita Ram Kohli Memorial Lectures—1985

LIFE AND TIMES OF JASSA SINGH AHLUWALIA

M.L. AHLUWALIA



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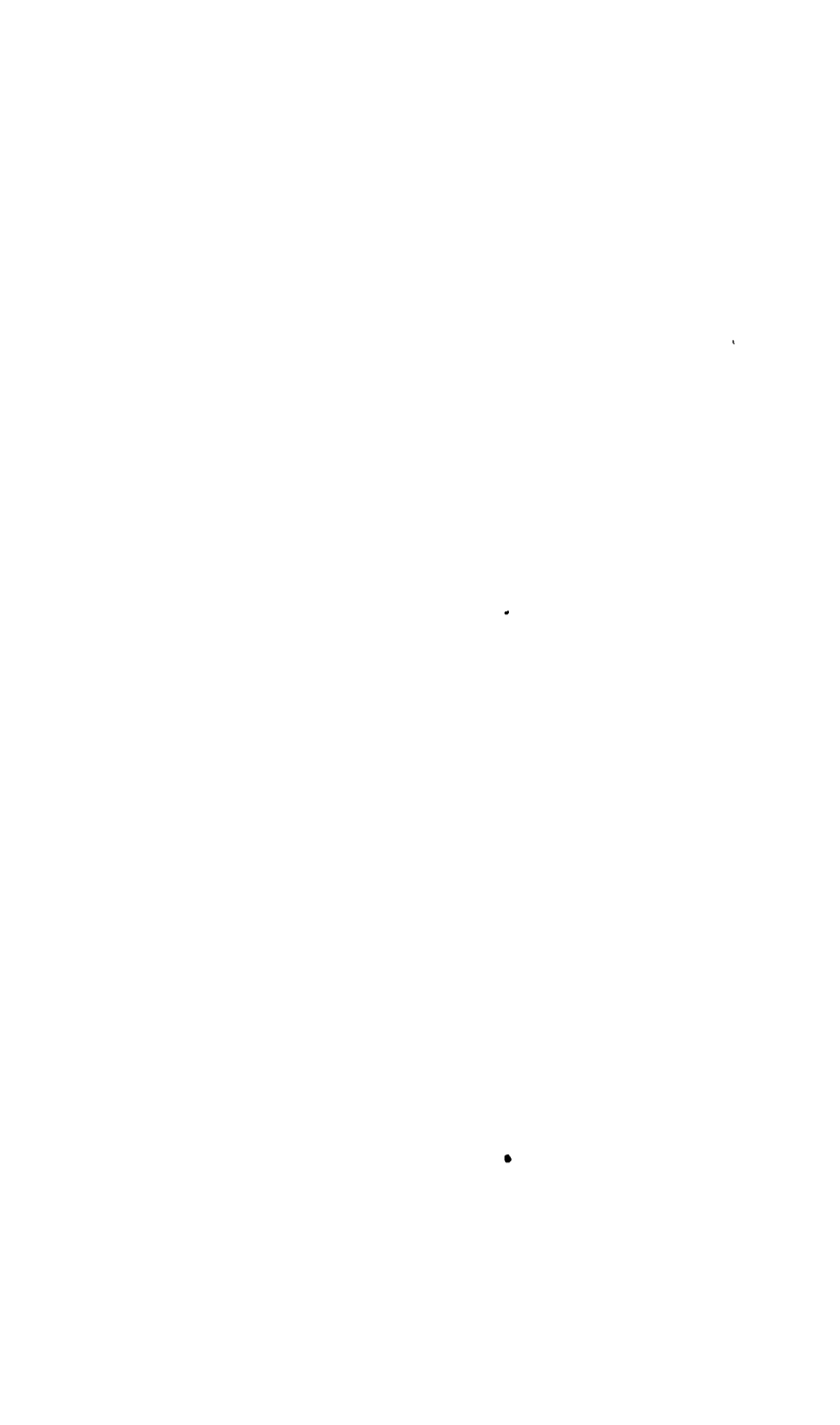


PREFACE

These lectures were delivered by me in March, 1985. I am glad to learn that Dr Bhagat Singh, Vice-Chancellor has shown personal interest in its publication. I also thank Dr G.S. Nayyar, former Head, Department of Punjab Historical Studies for his very personal interest in seeing the script through the Press. I had allowed him full liberty to check up details and make any correction necessary in the references quoted by me in these lectures. My thanks are also due to the Publication Bureau of the University.

March 1989

M.L. Ahluwalia



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Life and Times of Sardar Jassa Singh Ahluwalia 1718-1783

M. L. Ahluwalia*

LECTURE I

I may be excused if I start on the subject of my talk on a rather disappointing note. One great impediment which has so far hampered the work of compiling an objective history on the life and achievements of Jassa Singh Ahluwalia is the absolute lack of the original documentary evidence on the subject. With the exception of a couple of letters, which are said to have emanated from Jassa Singh Ahluwalia himself of which English version is available in the National Archives of India, in the records of the Foreign and Secret Department and a couple of letters said to have been written to him by Ahmad Shah Abdali and the then Mughal rulers¹ of Delhi, no other document on the subject from the Secretariat of the *Sultan-ul-Qaum* seems to have survived the ravages of the times. The result is that historians had so far no other alternative but to recapitulate his life story mostly from the few Persian manuscripts written by a few contemporary or near contemporary writers or from the accounts given by the British and other Europeans who had as yet a very imperfect knowledge of the whole *raison d'être* of the religion or polity of the Sikhs. Perhaps none of them had the chance of personally meeting Jassa Singh Ahluwalia. Therefore, one has to tread very cautiously while treating this subject. In fact, the same applied to the other Sardars of the Dal Khalsa, as well as to the Phulkian Rajas of Patiala, Nabha and Jind practically for the entire period of the 18th century. *Jassa Singh Binod*, an earliest manuscript written in *Gurmukhi* which relates to the life of Jassa Singh Ahluwalia, was compiled as late as 1827-30 A.D. or so during the time of the Chiefship of Sardar

* B-20, South Extension, New Delhi.

1. These are two *farmans* relating to land grants, but these are not considered genuine by the scholars.

Fateh Singh Ahluwalia, the grand nephew of Jassa Singh.

Similarly, the chronicle entitled *Umdat-ut-Tawarikh*, in which references to the parentage and activities of Jassa Singh Ahluwalia are mentioned in *daftar*s I and II, was started by its author Lala Sohan Lal Suri some time from 1818 onwards. Therefore, the information given in these two *daftar*s on Jassa Singh Ahluwalia and other Sardars of the Dal Khalsa days is not contemporary. However, we have it from the pen of the author that the details of the earlier events were compiled by him from the notes kept by his father Lala Ganpat Rai, who was a contemporary of Sukarchakia Sardars Charhat Singh and Mahan Singh, the grand father and father of Maharaja Ranjit Singh. Both of these Sardars were the contemporaries of Sardar Jassa Singh Ahluwalia and had always collaborated with the latter in facing Ahmad Shah Abdali.

One would have rather wished that from the very high office held by Jassa Singh Ahluwalia in the Sikh *Panth* and the Dal Khalsa, one could get some records of their day to day activities on the line of the *Akhbarat-i-Darbar-i-Muala*, or the Peshwa *Daftar* series. Actually the non-existence of something like regular *wajia* reports or *vakil* reports from the headquarters of the principal Sardars of the Dal Khalsa, suggests that for fairly long time these Sardars had not actually been able to set up a regular system of administration. Rather this trend had continued even with Maharaja Ranjit Singh, who is said to have thought about setting up of a regular Secretariat as late as 1807 or so. It is also not known how the files or *misls* which contained full details of the territories assigned to the various Chiefs of the Dal Khalsa, and which according to tradition, were created at the instance of Sardar Jassa Singh Ahluwalia and kept in the Akal Takht got dispersed.²

Due to the absence of authentic and contemporary evidence the scholars have not so far been able to solve even the controversy about the ancestry, the parentage and the place of birth of Jassa Singh Ahluwalia. The only point, where there is no difference of opinion among the scholars, is that Jassa Singh was born

2. It is just possible that at the time of the sack of Hari Mandir Sahib by the forces of Ahmad Shah Abdali in 1762, these files got dispersed or destroyed. But we do not get any clue to this fact even in the *Tawarikh-e-Ahmad Shahi*.

in the year 1718 A. D. and that his father's name was Badar Singh who died in 1722 A.D., just five years after the birth of Jassa Singh, leaving his widow no option but to place herself and her son Jassa Singh under the care of her brother Bagh Singh. That is all.

The account given in various writings even about Jassa Singh's parentage is confusing and at times contradictory. For example in the *gurmukhi* Ms. entitled 'Jassa Singh Binod,' compiled by Ram Sukh Rao, the court historian of Sardar Fateh Singh Ahluwalia, the village of Ahlu or Alloke is mentioned to be the village of Bagh Singh, the maternal uncle of Jassa Singh Ahluwalia where his mother had gone back with her son, after the death of her husband Badar Singh in 1722.³ According to Dr Hari Ram Gupta, Jassa Singh was born somewhere in the desert hideouts between Hansi and Hissar, where Badar Singh and his brother-in-law Bagh Singh had taken shelter after the defeat of the forces of Banda Bairagi in which both of them had fought as volunteers.⁴

According to Sohan Lal Suri, the author of *Umdat-ut-Tawarikh*, "the original homeland of Jassa Singh's ancestors was *Mauza* Mullu Sadhu-Ke in Majha. His *qaum* (caste) was *Kalal* alias *Tulsi* (sub-caste). He was brought up in his parental (maternal parents) house situated in *Mauza* Ahlu-Ke situated not far away from the above mentioned house of Mullu Sadhu-Ke." Sohan Lal further writes that Jassa Singh's *Khaldun* (family) along with other several residents of his village embraced Sikhism during the time of Nawab Kapur Singh who used to visit this village off and on. Jassa Singh was administered *pahul* and handed over to Kapur Singh. On account of his smart habits he gained influence with the Sikh Chiefs and some of the Sikhs became his followers. He became the *Sahib* of the *derah* and collected troops.⁵

3. The village of Ahlu is situated about 20 kms on the South-West of Lahore. This village was retained as the personal jagir of the ruling family of Kapurthala State till the time of the partition of Punjab in 1947. Jassa Singh Binod,' Ms., Punjab State Archives, Patiala, Folio No. 9-AB.
4. *History of the Sikhs* (Delhi, 1982), p. 24.
5. Sohan Lal Suri, *Umdat-ut-Tawarikh, Daftar 1*, p. 27.

In the publication entitled *Kapurthala State : Its Past and Present*, published in 1921, the ancestry of Jassa Singh is linked with the Royal House of Jaisalmer through one Sadhu Singh. In this account, Badar Singh is mentioned as the great grandson of Sadhu Singh, whereas Bagh Singh is known as belonging to the *Tulsi* sub-caste or *gotra* of the *Kalal* caste which was adopted by Badar Singh as his caste after his marriage with the sister of Bagh Singh, the *Kalal*.

Lepel H. Griffin writes with seemingly greater authority that Jassa Singh's ancestor Sadao Singh was an enterprising Zamindar, who three hundred years ago had founded the four villages namely Ahlo, Halo, Tor and Chak in the vicinity of Lahore which were still held in proprietary rights by his representatives. One of them Ahlo caused the family to be named by the distinguishing name of Ahluwalia. Griffin further states that Sadao Singh and Budha Singh both had served in the personal escort of Guru Hargobind, the sixth Sikh Guru. Ganda Singh, the son of Budha Singh, had also served the then Muslim *Subah* of Lahore. He was known to have looted the city of Lahore thrice before being taken into the service of the Subadar of Lahore. The latter had conferred on Ganda Singh the *zamindari* of the above named five villages probably as *wattan* jagir in the fashion of the times.⁶

Giani Gian Singh, the author of the *Raj Khalsa*, has published the genealogical table of the family of Rawal Jaipal and Salwahan, the founders of the House of Jaisalmer. In this genealogy, Sadao Singh is shown in the 15th generation of Rawal Salwahan. Sadao Singh's son was Gopal Singh, and his son was Dewa Singh and Dewa Singh's son was Badar Singh, the father of Jassa Singh.

The author of the *Raj Khalsa*, however, adds to this story and writes that the Rajput ancestors of Jassa Singh had come to be known by the sub-caste *Tulsi* after the name of the famous Rana Tulsi, who was the 8th in the line of Rawal Salwahan. He

6. Griffin calls Sadhu Singh by the name of Sadao Singh, which should be taken as correct, if the theory of the Rajput ancestry is true. Lepel H. Griffin, *Chiefs and Families of Note in the Punjab* (Lahore, 1909), pp. 496-97.

also asserts that this branch of the Jaisalmer Bhati Rajputs had adopted the *Kalal* caste much earlier than in the life time of Sadao Singh. The reason of the conversion to *Kalal* caste being the same, viz Sadao Singh's son Ganda Singh's marriage with the daughter of a *Kalal* family. Following the agreement between Ganda Singh and his wife's parents, all his four sons namely Gopal Singh, Hemu, Sikandar and Chaha had also married only in the *Kalal* families. Jassa Singh's family had sprung from Gopal Singh's son Dewa Singh. Dewa Singh had three sons, named Badar Singh, Sadar Singh and Gurbaksh Singh. Jassa Singh was the son of Badar Singh.⁷

In the circumstances it is very difficult either to confirm or deny any of the above theories relating to the ancestry of Jassa Singh Ahluwalia. The only thing that could be stated at this juncture is that Griffin had access to most of the contemporary documents, at least the earliest settlement reports which were compiled by the British officials. Moreover, Griffin belonging to the Political Department like his counterpart, Col. Tod in Rajputana, was given the assignment of conducting these studies for the official use of the British suzerain power to deal with the claims upon the throne, or on jagirs put forward by the native Chiefs and their collaterals in these States. But as this theory of conversion of the Rajputs to the *Kalal* caste or to the Sidhu-Brar-caste of the Jats, in the case of the families and collaterals of the Phulkian Chiefs of Patiala, Nabha, Jind and also of Faridkot and of the family of the *Bhais* of Kaithal, having been put forward much later, the whole should have to be studied afresh with the help of the recently opened original records of the princely States of Rajasthan and the other fresh documentary evidence which may be available from the archives of the rulers of the erstwhile Kapurthala and the Phulkian States. This should be done not for any political reason but to arrive at a better understanding of the social history of the times.

One thing comes out very clearly and that is that the claims to link the *Kalal* and the Sidhu-Brar Jat castes

7. *Raj Khalsa*, Part III, Kapurthala Misc No. 12. On the death of Badar Singh in 1779, Jassa Singh's family shifted to the house of Bah Singh in the village Ahlu, 'Jassa Singh Binod,' F. 9-B.

of the above mentioned royal houses with the ancient royal families of Rajputana is only an attempt on the part of these Chiefs to a better claim to royalty *vis-a-vis* the British Crown.

In any case this is a good field for fresh assessment by the experts on geneological studies and scholars of social history. The existing studies in the Annals of Jaisalmer, Annals of Rajasthan, the Antiquities of Rajputana, the *Aina-Brar Bans*, the Geneology of the Manj Rajputs of Ferozepur and of the Bhatīs of the Bhatner-Jaisalmer region, most of whom had adopted Islam almost during these very centuries, also need fresh examination in this context. There is no doubt that there was a large scale migration of Rajputs towards Bhatner and Haryana regions during the early period particularly when the river Ghaggar which used to flow along Sirsa to Hanumangarh in Bhatner, became dry and the inhabitants of Bhatner shifted *en masse* towards Punjab. Munshi Sohan Lal who wrote the first authoritative history of Bikaner also states that it were these "Theries" who later on came to be known as Bhati Rajputs. He further states that they were also nicknamed as Joias which according to him is the corrupt form of the Yodhas or Yodhiyas.⁸

The above mentioned controversy apart, the real heritage of Jassa Singh Ahluwalia as of all other Sikh Sardars of the period under reference lay elsewhere. The factors and forces which helped them to rise to political power are as follows :

Firstly, it was the availability of an organised platform in the Khalsa Panth and the more national philosophy and outlook on the socio-economic and political issues provided by the Sikh religion.

Secondly, it was the rural background of all these leaders of the resistance movement. Their ancestors whose life sustenance was either cultivation or the allied village handicrafts had suffered very much as a result of the unstable political condition which existed in the Punjab for nearly half a century from thence.

In the case of Sardar Jassa Singh Ahluwalia, his early years

8. Munshi Sohan Lal, *Tawarikh-i-Bikaner* (Urdu), 1890. Munshi Sohan Lal was a member of the Regency Council of Bikaner. He particularly mentions that Tod had committed a mistake by stating that the 'Joias' were Jats.

of adversity caused by the death of his father and his coming under the tutelage of Mata Sundariji, the wife of Guru Gobind Singh, and Nawab Kapur Singh also stood him in good stead in the years to come.

Let us delve on these factors in a little more detail. It is said that soon after the death of Badar Singh, the circumstances had forced the mother of Jassa Singh to take the child to Delhi and place him and herself under the care of Mata Sundariji, who had made Delhi as her headquarters after the demise of Guru Gobind Singh in 1708.⁹

In fact, after the demise of Guru Gobind Singh, it was Mata Sundariji who provided to the Sikhs and the Sikh *Panth* the necessary leadership. She was a very talented and devout lady and was known for her very deep faith in the political-cum-religious mission of the Sikh *Panth*. So much so that soon after the demise of Guru Gobind Singh, her household in Delhi became the nerve centre for the Sikhs. She provided them leadership and directions both on the political and religious matters. It was she who first thought of collecting the scattered compilations of her learned husband with the help of Bhai Mani Singh and Bhai Kirpal. She also, through their help, put the managements of the Hari Mandir Sahib at Amritsar and the Sikh shrines at Anandpur Sahib and other places on sound footing. Due to her great influence with the Sikhs, the Mughal emperors also maintained cordial relations with her.

It was in her sanctified household that Jassa Singh had spent the next eight years of his childhood where he studied the 3 Rs, and was also initiated into the studies of *Gurbani*. Side by side due to his above the average intelligence, Jassa Singh had not only acquired the culture and fineness of *Delhi-Walas* but also got an insight into the intriguing politics of the Delhi Court, which had by then become a matter of street gossip. Jassa Singh fully benefitted himself from this early tutelage.

9. The writer has on checking up the records of the *Pandas* of Kurukshetra found a reference to the fact that Sardar Bagh Singh had visited this place of pilgrimage with the child Jassa Singh. He may have done so on his way to Delhi where he was to leave the child under the care of Mata Sundariji, may be to ward off any evil predicted on the life of young Jassa Singh, after he was adopted by Sardar Badar Singh.

The rural base of the Sikh leaders had much to do with the nature and the method of the resistance movement they led. This factor of the rural base of the Sikh movement could be traced right from the time of Guru Nanak Dev onwards. Though all the Sikh Gurus belonged to the Khatri Bedi and Sodhi castes in the Hindu social order, yet they belonged to the middle class social strata of the rural Punjab. The Sikh Sardars who had actually organised the resistance movement against the Mughal State which had been increasingly turning towards Islamic fundamentalism during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries also belonged to this land-based middle class whose rural economy was shattered also as a result of the heavy imposts of imperial taxes which were imposed to meet the higher expenditure on the maintenance of costly bureaucracy and the imperial army.

In addition, the non-Muslim population were required to pay the additional imposts of *Jazia*, the pilgrimage taxes and so on, which were causing further dissatisfaction amongst them. As a result, there became current a saying in Hindi that 'it was better to become a Muslim than paying heavily for remaining a Hindu.' The position became all the more grave for the peasantry of the entire North-Western region of the Mughal Empire ever since the early eighteenth century when Banda Bairagi had led the movement in 1708-09 which continued till 1716.¹⁰

One could imagine the fate of the people particularly those living along the routes of these invaders, from the fact that every time the armies, whether of the enemy or of the ruling power would pass through any area, they would destroy, for miles around, all types of vegetation, crops as well as the trees in order to provide food and fodder to their soldiers and for the animals thereby rendering the entire cultivable land so completely barren and bereft of fertility that it would take the villagers a couple of years to raise crops on them and many more years to raise the trees.

The Maratha news letters written for the information of the

10. According to the 'Akhbarat-i-Darbar-i-Muala,' 5000 Muslims and thousands of Hindu Jats and others had joined in the rebellion led by Banda Bairagi. *The Panjab Past and Present*, Vol. XVIII, pt. II, Oct. 1984, pp. 24-174.

Peshwa by his informers posted in these quarters and the intelligence reports of the English East India Company's agents have left vivid accounts about the misery of the people on account of the famines, wars and pestilence in this region. Even earlier, for example in the years 1694, 1713 and 1722 A.D., famines of great severity had occurred partly following destruction of crops by the ravaging armies. It is also said that during the famine of 1713 lawless elements aided by the Pathans of Malerkotla carried out large scale depredations, which stopped only with the rise of Ala Singh, who took upon himself the work of resettlement of the peasants and villagers.

Therefore, it was almost a recurring phenomenon in the Punjab that after every foreign invasion there occurred famine and pestilence. Sometimes, it was on a large scale as it happened in the years 1748, 1756-57 and 1783. The local lawless elements also made the conditions worst for peace loving population of the countryside. Thieves, robbers and dacoits thrived. There are, however, reports about the fact that during the famine of 1783, most of the Sikh Chiefs continued to feed the poor in their respective *langars* or free kitchens. Sardar Budh Singh of Montgomery who belonged to the Nakai Misl sold all his property to feed the poor. The famine of 1783, called by the people as the *chalisa* as it occurred in year 1840 B.K. was the severest in the North-Western region from Hazara to Delhi and due to the failure of the *rabbi* crop, wheat was sold at Lahore at less than two seers or about one kg per rupee that is about ten times costlier than during the normal times in these days.¹¹

The same were the conditions in the Majha and Rachna Doab where the Nakai, the Faizullapuria, the Ahluwalia, the Bhangi and the Kanahya Sardars rose to meet the situation.

It is, therefore, a point worth studying as to what extent the poverty and the miserable conditions had led to their conversion to Islam in order to escape from the payment of *Jazia* and other capitation taxes, which the non-Muslims had to pay to the Islamic State under Islamic laws. It would not, therefore, be wrong to believe that quite a good percentage of the Balauchs, the Pathans, the Gakhars, the Tiwanas and other landed Hindu

11. *Calendar of Persian Correspondence*, Vol. No. VI.

peasantry of the trans-Jhelum and Trans-Indus regions had become converts to Islam in order to escape from these taxes.

It was, therefore, natural that in unison with the local Hindu Chiefs the Sikh Sardars throughout the Punjab, Haryana and the Gangetic Doab areas made it a point either to persuade these new Muslims to come back to the fold of Hinduism or to chastise them if they co-operated with the Persian and Afghan invaders, who would raise the cry of *Jehad* in their fight against them.¹²

The economic factor was no less important for the peasant classes who had no source of livelihood except tending to their lands or attending to other rural based crafts. It was, therefore, natural that as soon as an organised and strong front was opened which the Sikh-Panth had been able to provide in the Punjab, almost the entire peasantry, Jats as well non-Jats flocked to their standards. This had become evident as early as the first half of the 17th century, particularly, during the time of the pontification of Guru Hargobind Sahib. The Sikh Sardars who led the resistance movement during the 18th century were benefitted a lot from this fact. It was, therefore, one reason that as soon as the Sikhs had re-started the resistance movement after the demise of Guru Gobind Singh, they encouraged *Jatha-bandi* in the villages. Nawab Kapur Singh and after him Jassa Singh Ahluwalia, as the Chief of the Dal Khalsa, therefore, made *Jatha-bandi* an integral part of the Sikh resistance movement. Jassa Singh Ahluwalia, is said to have systematized it as he had asked almost every village to organise voluntary *Jathas* to feed the forces of the Dal Khalsa at a very short notice. So that way the *Jatha-bandi* had become the order of the-day in almost all the villages of the Punjab. It would not be a surprise that equipping the volunteers of the *Jathas* with horses and other accoutrement of warfare was also done through the collective efforts in most of the villages, apart from supplying them food and fodder. This aspect, indeed, requires probing in greater depth than done so far.¹³

12. Actually ever since the lead given by Banda Bairagi, this trend was kept up in the *Subahs* of Lahore, Sirhind and in Jammu and the Kangra hills. There are several references about this trend in the news letters of the period of Emperors Bahadur Shah I, Farrukhsiyar and onwards.

13. Arnold Toynbee in *A Historian's Approach to Religion* (p. 745), ascribes the political success of the Khalsa to having fought the Mughal ascendancy with its own weapons.

However, different standards have to be adopted in the case of the towns and the townsmen, whose economy mainly depended on trade and commerce. There is no doubt that their economy was also disrupted badly as a result of frequent wars and invasions. But there was some safety valve in their case. This was that both the local rulers as well as the invaders depended on the rich *sarafs* and *sahukars* for supplies for their armies. Therefore, they were not molested unless they refused to help the invaders. However, since it was a practice with invaders to loot the cities and abduct the women folk, the townsmen too would often get away from their habitats to safer places in the Shivalik Hills or shift permanently to towns and cities in the interior of Hindustan.

Infact, during the period of these invasions there was a large scale exodus of the affluent trading classes from the Punjab to the more safer towns in the Jamuna-Ganga Doab like Agra, Delhi, Kanpur, Lucknow and even as far as Allahabad and beyond Calcutta and towards the South as far Aurangabd and Hyderabad. The descendants of these trading castes from the Punjab such as Kapurs, Mehras, Malhotras, Mehtas, Sehgals as well as Aroras trace their migration from the Punjab to the 17th and 18th centuries. There are frequent references to these migrations in the Intelligence Reports now published in the form of calendars of Persian Correspondence by the National Archives of India, New Delhi.¹⁴

Jassa Singh Ahluwalia and all other Sikh Chiefs of the Mist period had, therefore, made it a point to ensure the safety of all such vulnerable sections of the society in the Punjab and to provide them with necessary protection so as to encourage them to carry on their trade and commerce. Accordingly, Jassa Singh Ahluwalia encouraged a large number of the traders from Lahore and other cities in Western Punjab to shift to Amritsar where they could work in greater safety. Fatehabad, which was chosen by Jassa Singh Ahluwalia as headquarters of his Chiefship, was already an important centre of local trade.

Yet another important factor which formed the heritage of Jassa Singh Ahluwalia and of the Dal Khalsa was the strong ties of brotherhood between the local civil population to whichsoever

14. *Calendar of Persian Correspondence*, Volumes I to VIII.

caste and creed they might belong. In this regard, it would be pertinent to point out that even in the time of worst political turmoil in the Punjab and elsewhere in India, and inspite of the cry of *Jehad* raised by the invaders from across the borders, as an easy method to instigate their uncouth soldiers to fight against the Indians in the name of the religion and also when Sikhs in the Punjab and Jats, Rohillas, Marathas were competing with one another to carve out their respective principalities, it was not a contest between the various religious communities, nor there were commotions on communal lines between the civil population as is the impression sought to be created by the foreign chronicles of these days.

It was simply a contest for gaining political hegemony in their respective areas or regions. If the villages and towns falling within the range of these political adversaries got devastated and their inhabitants suffered death or loot at the hands of the victorious armies then inhabitants belonging to all communities suffered. There are numerous references to this effect in the Intelligence Reports of the Maratha and other news writers. For example, a Marathi news report dated 5th April 1757 states that when Ahmad Shah Abdali was returning to his home country with the spoils of Hindustan, the Sikhs of various *Jathas* and the forces of Sardar Ala Singh united and looted the camp of Timur Shah, the son of Abdali who was carrying the spoils.¹⁵ The report states that the Sikhs were encouraged to do so on getting the news that Holkar was approaching Sirmind with his forces in order to chastise the invaders. In the same letter it is reported that the Marathas were also negotiating terms of cooperation with the Balauchi Chiefs in North-Western frontier for forming a united front against the Abdali. This point should be properly understood while discussing the forces, factors and issues involved in this many sided contest for political survival in which the Sikhs were an important party.

In a message sent by one Marathi news writer of date-line 23rd April 1757 from Delhi, the news writer by name Mirdna also refers to the same fact and states that on learning that the Nanak

15. *Peshwa Daftar Records.*

Panthis, as the Sikhs were called then, had looted the camp of Abdali, Suraj Mal. the *Jat* Chief of Bharatpur, was also rushing to that quarter.¹⁶

As to the communal harmony between the civil population of Hindus and Muslims, let us also refer here to a news letter stating that as a result of the severe famine which had engulfed practically the whole of northern India, Nawab Asf-ud-Daula, the Subahdar of Oudh had arranged a prayer on the banks of river Gomati in which the Hindus and Muslims joined in large numbers.¹⁷

In short, all these factors formed the rich heritage of Jassa Singh Ahluwalia and the other Sikh Chiefs of the period. Their mission was, thus, clear. It was to lay the foundations of a socio-political order which was just and fair to all "be they be of the East or the West or those living in the mountains of the Himalayas or in the towns of Hindustan, Afghanistan, Persia..." as was ordained by the Gurus.¹⁸

After Guru Gobind Singh this mission was taken up by Banda Bairagi and Nawab Kapur Singh Faizullapuria. From him it was taken over by Jassa Singh Ahluwalia. Whether he or his predecessors could fully succeed in this mission was another thing. Dr Gopal Singh describes this mission as "the Sikh bid to peoplehood."¹⁹

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16. Persian Records of Maratha History : Delhi Affairs (1761-88), tr. J. N. Sarkar, Nos. : B 11, p. 133; and B 12, p. 137. Also *Peshwa Daftar Series*, Vols. 21 and 27, letters No. 116 and 149.
 17. *Ibid*.
 18. Loose translation from the *Akal Ustat* composed by Guru Gobind Singh (ii-254-55).
 19. *History of the Sikhs*. See also V.P.S. Raghuvanshi, *Indian Society in the Eighteenth Century*, 1969; and Jagdish Narayan Sarkar *A Study of Eighteenth Century India*, Vol. I, *Political History, 1707-1761*. The author refers to Sardar Jassa Singh Ahluwalia and the Sikh Misls on pp. 320, 323, 326-27, 338, 341-44.

Indian Political Scene vis-a-vis Jassa Singh Ahluwalia

LECTURE II

In my to-day's talk I propose to touch upon a few similar other issues which have not so far been fully taken note of by scholars while assessing the achievements of the Sikh leaders of the Dal Khalsa of which Jassa Singh Ahluwalia was called by destiny to act as the supreme or the chief-in-command.

We would better assess this point, if we start with the political scenario in India at the time when Jassa Singh came to play the above role w.e.f. 1748 A.D. onwards. It is essential to take note of the entire political scenario, not only as it existed in India, but also in Central Asia on the one hand and in Europe on the other, because the political destiny of India was no less shaped by Nadir Shah of Persia and Ahmad Shah, the founder of the modern State of Afghanistan, but also by many European commercial concerns such as 'the English, the French, the Dutch and the Danish. East-India Companies,' which had by then, deftly manoeuvred from merely exploiting the commercial fortunes of the "East Indies," to become the major contestants for political power, due to the apparent existence of political vacuum in most of the countries of the East Indies, starting from Turkey in West Asia upto as far as Burma, Malaya, Singapore, China and Indonesia in the Far East.

Let us confine ourselves to India! In the beginning of the 18th century two things had become very clear to the political *Pandits* of the times. First that after Aurangzeb the days of the Mughal Empire were numbered; and secondly, that in that case some other power or powers should have to step into the shoes of the Mughal Kings. In that event, much depended on the power to be in the North-Western frontier region of the Empire as actually the first cracks in the extensive Mughal Empire had first appeared in the Central Asia from where Babur had started building it up. As early as the middle of the 17th century during the very reign of Aurangzeb, Persia (now Iran) including the

present day Afghanistan and other kingdoms of the then Asian Turkistan became independent one by one. During the same period the Mughal Emperors came more and more under the influence of fundamentalist orthodox Muslim theologians of the Sunni persuasion. Yet another unfortunate development was that by and by the hold of the Rajput princes on the central decision making authority of the Empire was fast on the decline. It is said that soon after the demise of Swai Jai Singh II, the wise guardian of the Empire on 15th April 1743, the proportion of Hindu chiefs amongst the Ministers of the Mughal Emperor had come down to only 18%. It was Swai Jai Singh II, who alone had the personal prestige and also resources to compel Aurangzeb's weak successors against imposing a virtually theocratic Islamic State on India. At least for sometime, Emperor Muhammad Shah nicknamed the 'Rangilla' was practically forced by Swai Jai Singh II to revoke many of the anti-Hindu laws of the time of Aurangzeb. In the personal papers of the ruling family of Jaipur, there are as many as 25 *parwanas* and *farmans* issued by Emperor Muhammad Shah between 14th May to 8th August 1722, of which copies were sent to Swai Jai Singh II to inform him that the Mughal Emperor Muhammad Shah had issued directions to all officials of the Realm not to confiscate the properties of the Hindu *sanyasis* and *faqirs* by way of escheat after the death of the owners; announcing the abolition of the *Jaziya*: exemption of the pilgrims tax on the Hindus and allowing them to make these pilgrimages without any type of harassment and so on.²² Similarly by another *parwana* dated 23rd October 1730, addressed to the *nutsadia* of the *Subah* of Allhabad, they were asked not to charge the *Bidar* tax from the Hindu pilgrims. By another *farman* issued in 1740, Muhammad Shah had even banned the killing of

20. National Register, Vol. I contains all the references to these documents earlier preserved in the Kapad Dawara of the Jaipur Royal Family. It is on record that the Rajas of Jaipur and Jodhpur had cleverly abstained from direct confrontation with forces against Banda Bairagi inspite of the repeated offers of additional jagirs granted to them by Emperor Bahadur Shah I. Similarly, the hill Rajas of Kangra, particularly the Raja of Sirmur helped Banda's forces to the great disappointment of the Mughal Emperor. See *Akhbarat-i-Darbar-i-Muala*.

kine with the same intention.²¹ There were many factors which had compelled Muhammad Shah to do this.

As a result of the rise of the Maratha power in South-West and Central India, the revolts of the Satnamis of Narnaul in Haryana and the rise of the power of the Dal Khalsa in the Punjab coupled with the threat posed by the invasions of Nadir Shah and Ahmad Shah, the Mughal emperors had been fast losing the image that they could not any longer hold the country together. These anti-Mughal risings had also shown to the Mughal kings that only through the policy of *Sulah-i-Kul* which was enunciated by Emperor Akbar after careful consideration and by which he had assured full respect to all the religions particularly the Hindus who were in majority, peace and prosperity could be established in this country.

It was this hollowness of the Mughals which had been the principal reason which encouraged Nadir Shah to invade India in 1739 and declare himself as the suzerain authority over the Mughal Emperor Muhammad Shah.

Nadir Shah's invasion on Mughal India in fact marks a turning point not only in the fortunes of the Mughal kings, but also in the political history of Hindustan as a whole. It was on the heels of Nadir Shah's invasion that the Sikhs, who had been badly worsted by Bahadur Shah I during the rebellion of Banda Bahadur, again decided to re-group themselves as the principal defenders of Hindu India towards the Punjab, while the Marathas under the able leadership of Peshwa Baji Rao, declared themselves independent of the Mughal authority practically in the whole of Gujarat, Maharashtra, Central India and had established their authority as far as Orissa towards the East and Aurangabad and Bidar down the South. The Marathas had also revived the slogan of *Hindu Pad Padshahi* as given by Shiva Ji. In Rajputana Swai Jai Singh II similarly led this movement and because Emperor Muhammad Shah heavily depended upon him for defending whatever was left of the Mughal Empire, he wisely used his influence with the Emperor for this common cause and it was on his advice that Muhammad Shah had conferred on the Peshwa the title of "Mukh Pradhan" of the Mughal Empire, and also

21. Kapad Dawara Records of Jaipur Royal Family.

bestowed on him the *subadari* of Malwa and on Kanhoji Rao Bhonsla, the *subadari* of Berar also in the name of the Peshwa.²²

With the death of Swai Jai Singh II in 1743 the feeble beginning attempted by him towards building up of a united front of the Marathas, Rajputs and the Sikhs suffered a great set-back. With the death of Muhammad Shah in 1748 and the first-invasion of India by Ahmad Shah Abdali in the same year a complete change came about in India's political scene. The Mughal King Ahmad Shah, the name sake of Abdali lacked the courage as well as the wisdom to contend with such a grave situation into which India was fast falling in consequence. Therefore, simultaneously with the recurrence of invasions of Ahmad Shah Abdali from across the borders of the country in the North-West, Murshid Kuli Khan, the strong governor of Bengal *subah* virtually declared his independence, with the *subadars* of Oudh and Hyderabad following suit.

The Marathas under the able stewardship of Baji Rao made quick moves to further consolidate their respective positions in Gujrat and Malwa. On the top of it Emperor Muhammad Shah who was nicknamed by the people of India as a *rangila* or a merry-maker King who felt more happy in the company of the singer-women and *nautch* girls of Delhi, than in discharging the serious responsibilities of a ruler had so squandered away whatever little money was left in the royal treasury, that his successors were hardly able to pay even the salaries of the army. In a situation like this, only a person of extraordinary character could meet the challenges before the King and the country.

It was in such a pitiable political situation of the country that Sardar Kapur Singh Faizalpuria decided to divert the energies of the emerging Khalsa towards the defence of the Punjab from outside invasions on the one hand and to establish a viable alternative to the tottering authority of the Mughals within. For this end in view he as a first step re-organised the scattered *deras* or *jathas* of Sikh guerilla volunteers into a type of federated fighting force and named it the Dal Khalsa²³ or the Khalsa army.

He placed them under a dynamic supreme commander like

22. *Ibid.*

23. Cf. Hari Ram Gupta, *History of the Sikhs*, Vol. IV, New Delhi, 1982, p. 13.

Jassa Singh Ahluwalia²⁴ and allotted to each one of them specific areas of action. The main purpose of the re-organisation of the *jathas* was two fold. Firstly, to harm the Mughal *Subadars* of Lahore and Sirhind as far as possible so as to reclaim Punjab from the Mughal hold and, secondly, to meet the threat of the invader Ahmad Shah Abdali.

In the context of the over all political scene in Hindustan, Jassa Singh Ahluwalia's career as chief of the Dal Khalsa can be divided into two very distinct phases viz., the period from 1748 to 1761 and from 1761 to 1783. During the second phase Jassa Singh Ahluwalia made a bid to claim for the Sikhs the right to have a say in the affairs of Hindustan and in deciding the fate of the dying Mughal State.

One thing more and this was that simultaneously with the establishment of the Dal Khalsa in the Punjab and the apparent disintegration of the Mughal Empire in quick succession, a third party, the English East India Company had emerged as a dominating power in India, by almost liquidating by 1756, its chief rival in Asia and Europe, that is the French. Then they turned their attention towards Shah Alam and the other Indian powers, so that with every successive invasion of Ahmad Shah, the English had always gained politically. For example, coinciding with Ahmad Shah's invasions of 1751 and 1756-57, the British quickly manoeuvred with the Nawabs of Murshidabad, Oudh and of Hyderabad on the one side, and with Hyder Ali, the new Chief of Karnataka and with Holkar and Scindia on the other, with the result that within the next decade it were the British who were dictating terms to all princes and chiefs in India including Shah Alam, the fugitive Mughal King.

For example Ahmad Shah Abdali's capture of Delhi on 13 January 1757, and declaring himself as the Emperor of India, by issuing a coin to this effect, had coincided with the capture of Calcutta by Clive after defeating Nawab Siraj-ud-Daula.²⁵ By the time Ahmad Shah Abdali had captured Delhi for the second time, as a result of his victory in the battlefield of Panipat in 1761,

24. *Ibid.*

25. Calendar of Persian Correspondence, Vol. I-IV.

Major-General Carnac, the Commander of the forces of the English Company of the Bengal Presidency had already forced the fugitive Mughal Emperor Shah Alam to give up his claim over Bengal in lieu of a meagre sum of (sicca) Rs. 1000 per day, which the latter badly needed to meet the expenses on his house-hold.²⁶

The English from their wide net work of informers, were quite well served to know in full that Ahmad Shah did not have the time nor the means to establish his permanent hold over Delhi. They had also by this time correctly assessed that due to the able leadership of Jassa Singh Ahluwalia, Ahmad Shah would not find it easy to keep the Punjab under his control for a longer time.

This fact is proved from the diplomatic correspondence exchanged between Ahmad Shah and the English Governor of Bengal. Before leaving Delhi Ahmad Shah wrote a letter dated March, 1761, addressed to Robert Clive, Company Governor at Calcutta saying that he was leaving India, after appointing Prince Jawan Bakht, the son of Shah Alam to rule in Delhi in the name of his father and had charged Nawab Siraj-ud-Daula of Oudh with the duty of collecting the arrears of revenue on Shah Alam's behalf from the provinces of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa.²⁷

This letter was replied by Governor Vansittart who had by then replaced Clive. In equally diplomatic phraseology, Vansittart stated in this letter that "Jafar Ali Khan had relinquished the *subadari* of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa and Mir Qusim Ali had been appointed in his place. He was obedient to the Emperor who had been escorted to Patna, and, if necessary, would be escorted to Delhi".²⁸

This game was actively and prudently pursued by Warren Hastings, the first British Governor-General of India, whose tenure well coincided with the last decade of the stewardship of Jassa Singh Ahluwalia in the Punjab. The step by step measures adopted by Jassa Singh Ahluwalia to obtain benefit from this situation only exhibit his shrewdness and sense of timing.

26 *Ibid.*

27. Quoted in "Select Documents Relating to Maharaja Ranjit Singh's Negotiations with the British Envoy C.T. Metcalfe 1808-1909 etc." (ed), M.L. Ahluwalia, 1982.

28. Calendar of Persian Correspondence, Vol. I-V.

The issuing of a coin in November, 1761 by Jassa Singh Ahluwalia after the capture of Lahore by him as the Chief of Dal Khalsa will have to be, therefore, viewed from the point of legal necessity for him. Between 1761-65, when the Mughal ruler was leading the life of a fugitive in the *subahs* of Oudh and Bengal, the English wrested from his hands the rights of *dewani* and the defence of the *subahs* of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa by the so called three *farmans* which the company got signed from him on 12 August 1765 with disastrous political consequences. But they were clever enough to maintain the facade of the sovereignty of Shah Alam, which was nothing but a farce. Again by the treaty of Salbai concluded on 5 May 1762 between the Peshwa and the British through the instrumentality of Madhav Rao Scindia, who then acted as the Principal go-between Nana Phadnavis, the shrewd Prime Minister of the Peshwa and the British, the latter had quietly manoeuvred to see that Shah Alam re-asserted his authority though as a facade with a view to contain the emerging power of both the Marathas and the Dal Khalsa.

This fact had almost taken Jassa Singh Ahluwalia and other Sikh Chiefs of the Dal Khalsa by surprise. Jassa Singh realising that the Dal Khalsa Chiefs individually or collectively would not be able to deal with the British power, therefore, moved quickly to establish a liaison with James Browne who was then proceeding towards Delhi to act as the special representative of Governor-General Warren Hastings at the Court of Shah Alam. This fact had made it clear to everyone that the English Company's Government would not any more allow the Marathas or Sikhs to have an upper hand in the affairs of Shah Alam. How Jassa Singh Ahluwalia reacted to this new development is evident from his correspondence with James Browne.

We have about fourteen documents being written, communications exchanged between James Browne on the one side and Jassa Singh Ahluwalia and other Chiefs of the Dal Khalsa particularly Sardar Lehna Singh Bhangi of the Bhangi Misl, the Raja of Patiala and a few others.²⁹

Most probably these communications were exchanged between

29. This correspondence forms a part of the group of records called Foreign Miscellaneous Series in the National Archives of India.

the months of April and July, 1783 soon after the fiasco created by the Sikh leaders at Delhi immediately after their victorious entry in the Mughal capital in March, 1783 and their quick withdrawal. Major Browne had not yet reached Delhi when the communications were opened. He was somewhere near the city of Deeg in Malwa. In the first instance the Dal Khalsa Sardars had sent feelers to him through unaccredited persons. But Major Brown did not purposely take note of these feelers. Thereupon Jassa Singh Ahluwalia started communicating with the British Agent through the accredited *vakils* of the Dal Khalsa, Lala Lakhpat Rai and Lala Ran Singh who were posted at Delhi at the Court of Shah Alam.

It will not be necessary for our purpose to refer here to these communications in in extens. It will be alright if we study from these communications the tone and the temper of both the sides. For example, to the first letter written by Lala Lakhpat Rai on behalf of Jassa Singh Ahluwalia and other Dal Khalsa Sardars in which it was boldly stated that the Sikh Chiefs were ready for mutual friendship with the English, the reply of James Browne was rather impolitic. Actually at that time Shafi Khan, the nephew of late Najaf Khan, the Prime Minister of Shah Alam was staying at the Camp of James Browne and was persuading him to launch a united front against the Sikh Sardars with the help of the forces of the Nawab of Oudh, the British and those of Shah Alam.³⁰

James Browne replied Lala Lakhpat Rai's above letter with the remarks that friendship with the British was conditional on the Sikh Chiefs giving up the practice of invading the Gangetic Doab and on their recognising Shah Alam's authority.

In reply to the above letter, Lala Lakhpat Rai made a firm pronouncement to the effect that firstly the sole aim of the Sikh Chiefs was to secure peace and security of the common man, and secondly, to announce that the sway of the Khalsa rule extended from Multan and Attock and the territories held by the Chiefs, earlier deputed by the rulers of Afghanistan in India, thereby indirectly affirming that they had no intention of superseding the authority of Shah Alam in the interior.

In reply to another letter of James Browne in which he had

30. James Browne's Private letters to Warren Hastings, dated 4 August 1773.

charged Sikh Chiefs that their actions and policies were solely guided by greed for loot and territorial aggrandisement, Lala Lakhpat Rai sent the very forthright answer. He wrote that 'the first wish of the Khalsa was to secure the well being of the people (of Hindustan); that the Sardars of the Dal Khalsa had been forced to take action against certain Chiefs, who were not true to their engagements with the Khalsa'. Lakhpat Rai concluded the above reply by asking James Browne to prove what he was alleging about the actions of the Sikh Sardars.

However, in a separate letter written by Sardar Jassa Singh Ahluwalia to James Browne, the former uses a very temperate language by telling the British Agent that 'let the past be buried deep' as it was no use maligning any side, thereby offering to James Browne that the Sikhs were prepared to work out a stable political system with the help of the British. The unexpected and sudden death of Jassa Singh Ahluwalia had, however, abruptly closed this chapter of negotiations between him and the British. It would not, therefore, be easy to say with conviction as to what would have been his actual policy in reaching a political settlement with the British because there was quite a wide gap between the postures taken by both the sides, particularly with regard to recognising the authority of Shah Alam as a sovereign of India which in fact he was not at that time.

As a matter of fact, the agreement made by some Sikh Chiefs with the Maratha Sardar Madhav Rao Scindia on 10 May 1785 through the intervention of Partap Singh, the Raja of Macheri, who was known for his pragmatism and his great concern for a united stand by the nationalist forces had not achieved much and after the death of Madhav Rao in 1794 this treaty had become abortive. It is also not clear whether all the terms of the above treaty were actually fulfilled by both the sides or not.³¹

Before concluding this aspect it should be stated in defence of Jassa Singh Ahluwalia, that it was a part of his known policies, which he had derived from his preceptor Sardar Kapur Sing Faizalpuria, that if a new political chapter was to be opened in the interest of Hindustan, both the Mughal and the Afghan States

31. The Sikh Chiefs were to help Madhav Rao Scindia with a force of 5000 horse in lieu of Rs. 10 lakhs worth of jagir. CPC Vol. Nos. VI and VII.

should not have any place in this new arrangement. It was because of this firm stand of Jassa Singh Ahluwalia that no settlement was reached between him and Raghu Nath Rao in 1758, as the latter was acting in the name of Shah Alam.

Had the Marathas not gone in for soft options at that time, and on the other hand made a firm national alliance not only with the Dal Khalsa but also with the Rajput Princes of Jaipur and Jodhpur, the history of India would have been different from what it became as a result of the defeat of the Marathas at the inglorious battle fought on the battlefield of Panipat in January 1761, with Sikhs and the Rajputs standing apart.³²

In this context it will be interesting to know that every time Ahmad Shah Abdali invaded India, he would write to each of the principal contending parties i. e. Shah Alam, the Marathas, the Rajas of Jaipur and Jodhpur as well as Jassa Singh Ahluwalia to assure them individually that his sole purpose in coming over to India at that particular time was to help one or the other party or to amicably settle the dispute between them. In this way he would ensure that no joint front was formed against him. It was also obvious that every time someone or the other party would invite him secretly to its help. But it is certain that Jassa Singh Ahluwalia and the Dal Khalsa had never asked for the help of a foreigner like Ahmad Shah Abdali. On the contrary the Dal Khalsa Chiefs would mark out the governors and administrators appointed by Ahmad Shah in the provinces of Multan, Lahore and Sirhind in particular and would make all efforts to liquidate them as soon as possible.

There have been several explanations by different authorities about the nature of the Sikh Misdari System, ranging from confederacy, to plutocracy, oligarchy and even simple autocracy. But more than this controversy, the scholars have not as yet come to a definite conclusion as to from which date or dates the Sikh Misdari System should be considered to have come in vogue from a purely legalistic and constitutional point of view. Actually, we have strayed ourselves from the main issue by our attempts to trace the existence of Sikh Misdari System right from the time of Guru Gobind Singh, who happened to have divided his volunteer

32. G.S. Sardesai, *New History of the Marathas*, p. 81.

forces at the battle of Bhangani in 1688 into five formations each under one Commander, and to which Sainapat, the biographer of Guru Gobind Singh gives the name of Misls. Sainapat also uses the term Misl, for the groups of volunteers and devotees who had thronged to the Camp of Guru Gobind Singh in 1707 at Nanded. But in both the cases the term Misl was used for the *jathas* or groups of volunteers and nothing more.³³ These *jathas* did not enjoy any legal status nor any sovereign authority as ascribed to the Misdari System. Let us understand this more fully by examining the various connotations attached to the term Misl. According to the glossary of Oriental terms compiled by Wilson, the term Misl had been in vogue in the north-western region of India including the Punjab for officers employed to assess the land for tax purposes. In Telugu, the term Misl was variously known as 'Misl Karnan' for the principal or the Headman of the village, and 'Misl Reddi' for the village community as a whole which enjoyed equal status. This term was also used to denote, 'an assemblage of persons of same or alike status.' In any case the term Misl had certain definite legal connotation and enjoined the power of assessing and collection of taxes, the power which flows directly from the right of a sovereign power. The concept of equal status ascribed to the constituents of a Misl also flows from the legal status of collective sovereign authority enjoyed by any ethnic community or any fraternity and its recognition by law. The whole concept is based on the dilution of sovereign authority amongst the federating fraternity either from above or from below. The Sikh Misdari System was in a way a unique amalgam of both these concepts of statehood. But the Misls as such had not come into being earlier than 1753. It should be remembered that the Mughal State had not yet finally broken till 1757 when the Mughal Emperor Ahmad Shah, had formally accepted the overlordship of Ahmad Shah Abdali and the latter had issued coins in Delhi, while the Mughal province of the Punjab was declared as part of the Afghan Empire and placed in the strong hands of Muin-ul-Mulk popularly known as Mir Mannu, the former Mughal Governor of Lahore.

33. Hari Ram Gupta, *op. cit.*, pp. 5-7. For details see G.S. Nayyar, *Sikh Polity and Political Institutions*, New Delhi, 1979, pp. 113-15,

We often tend to take the year 1748 as the starting point of the establishment of the defacto authority of the Sikh Misls on the wrong impression created by the policy of reconciliation with the Sikh guerilla Chiefs which was adopted by Nawab Zakriya Khan, the *subadar* of Lahore on the advice of the Mughal Emperor Muhammad Shah. There were many reasons for this policy of conciliation. Firstly, Muhammad Shah was a liberal minded ruler, who wished to discard invoking the principles of orthodox Muslim fundamentalism, due to the influence of Swai Jai Singh II.

Secondly, in south-western and central Hindustan, the Marathas were extending their political sway due to the energetic leadership of Peshwa Baji Rao. The Emperor was also worried about the possible invasion of Hindustan by the Persian Emperor Nadir Shah soon after he had consolidated his position nearer home. The Emperor, therefore, wanted to pacify the Sikh guerillas who were emerging as a political factor on this important flank on his Empire. But Zakriya Khan and the Mughal Emperor wanted to do so on their own terms such as by offering a jagir to Kapur Singh Faizalpuria in 1734 whom the Sikh guerilla *derahs* had accepted as their common leader for taking collective political decisions.

The jagir offered to Kapur Singh in 1734 by Zakriya Khan simply implied vassal-chief relationships, whether this was made explicit or not in the state document. Sardar Kapur Singh and other Sikh Sardars were however not agreeable to adhering to the limitations imposed on him by the jagir and the title as a vassal of the Mughal State.

In order to have a clear-cut idea about the status of the Sikh guerilla bands, one could not but refer to the dialogue held at Lahore between Nadir Shah, the Iranian invader and Zakriya Khan, the Governor of Punjab, when Nadir Shah was returning to Persia, after defeating the Mughal Emperor. It is quoted as follows: "Nadir Shah, asked Zakriya Khan, who were the long-haired barbarians" who had dared to molest him. Zakriya replied that they were Sikhs whose homes were the saddles of their horses, those people, he said, had no fixed place as their residence. They avoided populated areas and lived entirely in jungles. They lived an extremely hard life and knew not the taste of salt and butter.

They lived on the jungle berries and coarse grain.³⁴

This was, thus, the legal position of the *jathas* of Sikh guerillas in 1739-40. Eight years after in 1748 Nawab Kapur Singh re-organised these 64 or 65 guerilla *jathas* into eleven or twelve *derahs*.

Sohan Lal Suri, the author of *Umdat-ut-Twarikh* writes in particular that as a result of the strong action taken by Governor Zakriya Khan, some Sikhs were forced to move from the Majha region to Bist Jalandhar Doab, where they established themselves under the leadership of Bagh Singh Ahluwalia where they would stop traffic and plunder and loot large number of villages and towns and exact heavy tribute from the neighbouring zamindars. This was the state of affairs before the death of Bagh Singh, the maternal uncle of Jassa Singh Ahluwalia.³⁵

It has been asserted by some historians that at the meeting of the *Sarbat Khalsa* held on 29 March 1848 at the Golden Temple, when Kapur Singh formally announced the formation of the Dal Khalsa and invested Jassa Singh Ahluwalia with the power to act as its Chief Commandar, the Khalsa convention by a gurmata had declared itself to be a sovereign body. But unless the text of such a declaration is subjected to legal scrutiny, it would be difficult to take this to be the real starting point for even a defacto Sikh Misldari System.

The position of the Sikh guerilla leaders had, infact worsened as a result of the victory of Ahmad Shah Abdali over the Mughal King of Delhi in 1751 as a result of which the victor had declared in March 1752 that the *subahs* of Punjab formed a part of Afghan Empire in which the Sikh Sardars had infact no legal status.³⁶ So much so that even the mud fortress called Ram Rauni, which the Sikhs had set up on the outskirts of Amritsar ostensibly for the protection of the holy city of Amritsar, was declared to be an unlawful act on the part of the Sikh guerilla leaders and the Mughal forces continued the sieze of this fortress for three months from October to December 1748 and it required an intercession by Dewan Kaura Mal with the Governor of Lahore, Mir Mannu to

34. Arjan Das Malik, *An Indian Guerilla War—The Sikh Peoples War, 1699-1768*, p. 43. See also, *Twarikh-i-Hind* by Ahmad Shah Batalvi, p. 35.

35. *Umdat-ut-Twarikh*, Daftar I, p. 109.

36. *Fatuhah-l-Nazira*, tr. Elliot & Dowson.

allow the Sikhs to retain this fortress on condition of their future good conduct.

The Sikhs however, did not fully comply with the above terms which forced Mir Mannu, then acting on behalf of Ahmad Shah even to confiscate the jagir of the twelve villages of Patti and Jhabal parganas, which was assigned to Harmandir Sahib in 1749 to meet the expences for carrying on religious ceremonies at the Sikh shrines and the fortress of Ram Rauni was again besieged. The Sikh guerillas moving around Batala were also attacked by the flying columns of the State forces, with the result that no Sikh Chief could again dare to enter Amritsar, till the death of Mir Mannu.

Then came the third invasion of Ahmad Shah Abdali in 1757 and Jassa Singh Ahluwalia had to seek an alliance with Adina Beg, the Faujdar of Jalandhar, and even to seek the help of the Marathas in the month of April, 1758 in order to expel the Afghan Army from Lahore.

It would, therefore, not be legally correct to say that in 1748 or even as late as 1757 a de facto Sikh Misl System had been recognised, notwithstanding the fact that Jassa Singh Ahluwalia did claim as early as 1748 in his conversation with Dewan Kaura Mal that the whole of the Punjab belonged to the Khalsa³⁷. He had said this while refusing to accept a jagir from the Mughal *subadar* Zakriya Khan. But this was a mere claim and not an established fact.

Another way to ascertain the dates from which various Sikh Misls could claim their beginning as de facto legal entities, is to find out the dates from which each one of them had established a permanent hold on certain assigned areas and had been recognised by the people of those areas as their legal masters and they began to pay to them willingly the revenues and other taxes.

Even this mode of deciding this issue is invested with many difficulties in the absence of authentic documentary evidence, and the natural tendency to confuse forcible collections made from time to time as a result of raids. Very often we find that the contemporary or near contemporary writers refer to these exactions by the term of tribute, which even if it was so, was nothing more

37. Jassa Singh Binod, MS., p. 32.

than a temporary connivance in a particular situation and the Chief or the Zamindar from whom this tribute was exacted did not mean to shift his allegiance from the over all sovereign authority in that area. The term tribute is a very legal expression and hence it is often used very loosely even for exactions made by one Chief from another as a result of local situation.

Yet another test would be to take up the period of the setting up of permanent headquarters of the various Sikh Misldars. For example Jassa Singh Ahluwalia is said to have set up his permanent headquarters at Fatehabad as late as December, 1753 after the death of Muin-ul-Mulk, the Governor of Punjab, although he had raised and looted this town quite often earlier.

Hari Singh, the founder of the Bhangi Misl who commanded the largest contingent of Sikh soldiers amongst the Sikh Chiefs had also set up his quarters first in the village of Sohal and later in the nearby village of Gilwali in the Amritsar District at about the same time.

Jassa Singh Ramgarhia on the other hand started his career as a *tumandar* in the rank of a Risaldar in the service of Zakriya Khan. For some time he was used as a go between by Zakriya Khan and his defiant *faujdar* Adina Beg Khan and also his good offices were used by Zakriya Khan with other guerilla Sikh Sardars. Thus, the Ramgarhia Sardar could not establish his permanent headquarters first at Sri Hargobindpur and then at Miani till September, 1758.³⁸

Dr. Hari Ram Gupta concedes that on the death of Adina Beg Khan in September, 1758, these Sikh Sardars began to take possession of villages and to set themselves up as chieftains.³⁹ So also Sardar Charhat Singh, the founder of the Sukarchakia Misl had built in 1758 only his first *kucha* brick fortress at Gujranwala and declared his independence from Jai Singh, the Chief of the *derah* of the Kanahiyas, whom he had joined as a Sardar after the demise of Nawab Kapur Singh Faizalpuria, in 1753. It is needless to refer individually to other lesser chiefs or heads of other Misls as they could establish their independent Misls only between the years 1758 and 1762.

38. Hari Ram Gupta, *op. cit.*, pp. 278-79.

39. *Ibid.*, p. 279.

The position of Ala Singh who belonged to the senior branch of the Phulkian family in the Malwa region of the Punjab is somewhat different. He had started his political career sometime during 1722-23 as a *Chaudhri* of some villages with Barnala as his headquarters. Even his career of conquests does not start before 1752, when he had established his supremacy over 84 villages of Pargana Sanaur, after defeating its Chief Muhammad Saleh Khokhar. But Ala Singh and his successors always claimed that they were Zamindars under the Mughals or the Afghans.

From the above it is quite clear that almost all the Sikh Misls had assumed de facto independence between the years 1753 and 1762, depending upon their local circumstances and on the political conditions in the Punjab on the whole.

One thing more and that is that the term 'Misl' for the Sikh Chiefships had come into vogue quite late in the 18th century and this term was never used for the Sikh Chiefships in any of the 18th century Mughal documents or for that reason in no other document issued by the Marathas, Afghans, the Rajputs or the English. They are either mentioned as Sardars or *Sardaran-e-Aala* or *Sardaran-e-Umda*. Among themselves the Sikh Sardars would use the term 'Singh Sahib' for the Chief of the Dal Khalsa. Ram Sukh Rao, the author of *Jassa Singh Binod*, occasionally uses the title of *Sarkar-e-Wala* for Jassa Singh Ahluwalia after the year 1761 probably because the Dal Khalsa had after their occupation of Lahore, the capital of the *subah* of Lahore, had issued a coin in his name. We have already referred to the term of *Badshah Singh* used by James Browne for Jassa Singh Ahluwalia, as late as 1783 which was nothing but a loose transliteration of the word Singh Sahib.

It would, thus, be proper to conclude this issue by saying, that the Misdari System, to denote the de facto sovereign status for the Sikh Chiefs, cannot be confused with the various uses to which this term has been put from time to time. Secondly, that the Sikh Chiefships had acquired this status only as late as 1753 or even afterwards. Before this period they were only acting as organised *jathas* and were more or less fighting as guerillas.

Lastly, that these Chiefships were functioning only as de jure sovereign authority being ascribed to the Sarbat Khalsa or the collective will of the entire Khalsa as expressed from time to time

through the gurmattas of this conceptual Khalsa.⁴⁰

It may not be out of place to mention here the controversy over the first coin issued by Jassa Singh Ahluwalia—an issue which is very significant from historical angle. This issue has generated a good deal of controversy because of two reasons. One is as discussed earlier, that in accordance with the Sikh concept of collective sovereignty of the Khalsa, no person, howsoever high could dare to inscribe his own name on a coin and much less a person like Jassa Singh Ahluwalia who was an ideal democrat in every sense. The controversy has been heightened because of the fact that not a single coin referred to above is known to have survived on the basis of which scholars could finally solve this controversial issue. However, it is essential to refer to this issue here because of its twofold relevance to the subject under discussion.

First, if Jassa Singh Ahluwalia had issued the above coin, then what were the reasons which forced him to do so. Second, in approving the wording of the inscription for the coin, if at all issued, did or could Jassa Singh have any ulterior motives to assert his personal authority over that of the conceptual Khalsa. The third issue is the controversy as to the date when the coin was first issued, in 1758 when the few outskirts of Lahore were first occupied by the Sikhs after Reghunath Rao's victorious return, or in 1761 after Ahmed Shah Abdali's retreat from the Punjab. For these reasons, this issue needs our attention here in a more formal manner.

Firstly, as to the controversy about the issuing or non-issuing of this coin, the sources of information confirming the minting of such a coin have an edge over those who deny this. For example, amongst the earliest and contemporary accounts, this point is confirmed by the author of *Umdat-ut-Tawarikh*, the 'Khazana-i-Amira' and also of the 'Jassa Singh Binod'. A few later accounts including the official history of the Kapurthala State, firmly mention this to be a fact.

In his "Tracts" Browne writes at one place that he had

40. This aspect of the conceptual sovereignty of the entire Khalsa could be compared to the theories of social contract as the basis of the State, as propounded by Hobbes, Locke and Rousseau, the three famous political thinkers of the 18th century contemporary Europe.

several of these coins in his possession. Sohan Lal Suri, in his authoritative chronicle *Umdat-ut-Tawarikh*, which extends back to the times of the Sikh Misls on the authority of his father Lala Ganpat Rai, also categorically says that the above named coin was issued by Jassa Singh Ahluwalia to commemorate the liberation of Lahore by him from the authority of Ahmad Shah Abdali.

Dr Hari Ram Gupta bases his thesis mainly on the authority of the author of *Khazana-i-Amira*, who was a contemporary of Jassa Singh Ahluwalia to believe that the above coin was issued in the name of Jassa Singh Ahluwalia.

Dr Ganda Singh has denied the existence of such a coin on the authority of the author of *Chahar Bagh-i-Punjab*, Ganesh Das Vadehra, but Vadehra had compiled this book much late in the 19th century.

Dr N.K. Sinha has discussed this issue in a most lucid, scholarly and convincing manner in the chapter entitled 'De Facto Sikh Sovereignty' wherein he categorically concludes with the authoritative statement of Browne that the coins were current for about 15 years and then the Grand Diet of the Sikh Chiefs or the Sarbat Khalsa called in all these rupees and struck them in the names of Guru Nanak and Guru Gobind Singh.⁴¹

Although as yet no fresh and more conclusive evidence has come by on this issue than that already used and discussed by the scholars and it is also not necessary in a talk like this to enter into more minute details, but viewing the issue purely from a legalistic point of view, the probability of the issuing of this type of coin by Jassa Singh, should be accepted rather than rejected.

It is a well-known and universally accepted convention that coins are minted and issued announcing the establishment of a new sovereign authority in place of the one which has ceased to exist as a de jure power. This was done twice by Ahmed Shah Abdali after defeating his name sake Ahmad Shah, the then Mughal King of Delhi. This coin, it is said, was issued with the Persian inscription of which the English version would read as follow :

41. James Browne, 'History of the Origin and Progress of the Sicks', *Early European Accounts of the Sikhs* (Ed. Ganda Singh), pp. 40-41,

Coined by the Grace of Khalsa Jeo in the country of Ahmad (Shah) captured by Jassa Kalal.

The language of the inscription on the coin proves beyond doubt that Jassa Singh Ahluwalia, by inserting his own name in the coin, certainly did not mean any disrespect to the conceptual Khalsa, whose authority is beseeched in the coin in the very first line "coined by the Grace of Khalsa Jeo.

The question at that time, was not that Jassa Singh Ahluwalia whom Dr N.K. Sinha describes "as that democratic leader, conspicuous for his spirit of self sacrifice and too whole souled a patriot" to attempt to distinguish himself in a way so revolting to a Sikh.⁴²

The question instead was of great and imminent political necessity to announce the establishment of the sovereignty of the Khalsa over the territories then legally claimed by Ahmed Shah Abdali, on the similar basis of a military victory, which everyone knew, would not be recognized by the contending Khalsa under any circumstances. I have simply sought to re-open this controversial issue and invite the scholars to examine it afresh from the purely legalistic point of view and not from any emotional angle. The issue is irretrievably connected with the establishment of the de jure sovereignty of the Khalsa.

There seems to be much force in the version of the author of *Khazana-i-Amira*, Ghulam Ali Azad, who compiled his work within a few months of the issuing of this coin. He confirms the issuing of such a coin after the Sikhs had conquered Lahore under the leadership of Jassa Singh Ahluwalia. He notes, "they (Sikhs) had raised a person named Jassa Singh from among themselves to the status of a king, and like a demon, they made him sit on the throne of Jamshid."

This does not mean that there might have been no controversy on this action of Jassa Singh Ahluwalia later on. There is also the probability of the objection having been raised in inscribing the name of Jassa Singh on the coin by the Sikh Chiefs who had never yet taken the rise of Jassa Singh Ahluwalia to that position of pre-

42. Dr N.K. Sinha quotes Whitehead (*Catalogue of Coins in the Lahore Museum*, Vol. III), that issuing of coins was "singularly well adapted to make manifest to the comprehension of all classes the immediate change in the supreme royal powers."

eminence with good grace. After all, the conquest of Lahore in 1761 was mainly attempted by the forces of Jassa Singh Ahluwalia, the Bhangi and the Kanahya Sardars and a few others. So while issuing this coin, the entire Sikh leadership could not be consulted. But there is no room also for blaming Jassa Singh Ahluwalia on this account as even the later version of the Sikh coinage with the name of Gurus Nanak and Gobind Singh was adopted only by the Khalsa acting under the advice of Jassa Singh Ahluwalia. The main issue was that the Sikh Chiefs who joined hands in the capture of Lahore in 1761 did accept the legal necessity of issuing their currency in the name of a person or persons because that was a system recognised in legal parlance. This is further confirmed by the decision taken in the Sarbat Khalsa held in 1765, in which a standard Sikh coin with the names of the first and the last Gurus was duly inscribed in Persian. The inscription on these coins reads as :

Degh-O-Tegh-O-Fateh-O-Nasrat-i-Bedirang
Yaft Az Nanak Guru Gobind Singh.

It may also be said in conclusion of this issue that perhaps some other Misls and Sikh Chiefs at the later stage had also issued coins. Some coins issued by the Sikhs before the rise of Maharaja Ranjit Singh are presently preserved in the Punjab Government's Museum at Patiala. Maharaja Ranjit Singh's Government had recognized as many as 18 types of different coins, some issued by the Maharaja and others which were prevalent earlier than that, particularly in Hazara, Peshawar, Kashmir, Multan and other places in his Kingdom. In India as a whole, hundreds of types of coins were minted and these circulated along with the Mughal coins of *rupaya* and *paisa* and the *sicca* rupee issued by the English East India Company.

Therefore, the coins issued by the authority of the Dal Khalsa in 1761 and 1765 should be considered as a symbolic measure just to declare the attainment of de jure sovereign status by the Khalsa.⁴³

43. These were popularly called *Gobind Shahi* coins issued during 1765-1775. The above coins with the name Guru Nanak, were known as *Nanak Shahi* coins which were current around the year 1784, in which the word 'ahad' viz, rule also occurs significantly. See C.J. Rodgers, *Coins of the Sikhs*.

Organisation of the Dal Khalsa

LECTURE III

It would not be possible to escape reference to the military organisation of the Sikh Misls, while talking about the life of Sardar Jassa Singh Ahluwalia, their chosen Supreme-Commander. Here too, the main difficulty is the non-availability of the records of any of the Misls on this subject. Scholars like Dr Hari Ram Gupta and of late, Shri Arjan Dass Malik have, no doubt, attempted to recapitulate the subject in some depth on the basis of scanty references in the writings of some contemporary Europeans like Col. Polier, George Thomas, Franklin, George Forster or on the basis of Persian manuscripts like *Jang-Namah* by Qazi Nur Mohammad of Gunjalia (Baluchistan) (1765 A.D.), Nur-ud-Din's account of Najib-ud-Daulah (1773 A.D.), *Tahmas-Namah* by Tahmas Khan, popularly known as *Miskin* (1782 A.D.) and *Haqiqat-i-Bina Wa-Uruj-i-Firka-i-Sikhan* by Prince Timur Shah and so on but these studies are very sketchy as far as the details are concerned.⁴⁴ We have as yet no information on more important aspects of the military organisation like the Misl-wise details of the strength of the combatants and non-combatants, their division and sub-divisions in heirarchical order, their sources of the supply of weapons of warfare, their methods of recruitments, so on and so forth. There is no account whatsoever as to the nature and type of organisational changes effected in the forces of the Dal Khalsa as soon as the first phase of the guerilla warfare was over, say around 1753, when the Sikh Misdars had set up their permanent headquarters in various parts of the Punjab, from where they began to administer their respective territorial acquisitions.

44. Dr Gupta is the author of *History of the Sikhs : The Evolution of Sikh Confederacies* and has recast his Ph.D. and D. Litt. theses and published them in four volumes under the title of *History of the Sikhs*. Mr Arjan Dass Malik has written 'The Sikh Peoples War' entitled *An Indian Guerilla War*.

A very important factor, which the Sikh Misldars had to keep in their minds, while re-organising their respective *derahs* of volunteers at that stage was that the new organisation must be able to meet the challenge then posed by the world's greatest military commander Ahmad Shah Abdali. In order to meet this challenge, very quick changes must have been effected in the organisation of the forces of the Dal Khalsa. Therefore, the first thing the Sikh Sardars had done was to prove that they were the genuine protectors of the civil liberties of their subjects. Their earlier tactics to collect resources from the civil population by threats of plunder was replaced by lawful charges which their *rayat* who were completely freed from the yoke of the Mughal and the Afghan misrule in the local administration, would gladly pay irrespective of their religious beliefs.

A similar change must have taken place on the side of the army, in which the professional soldier in each of the forces of the Misls was called upon to swear first to the loyalty of the Misl in which he served, whether as a volunteer or as a paid soldier.

In 'Jassa Singh Binod' we do get somewhat detailed information on this aspect as well. This information is useful in dispelling quite a few misconceptions about the mode of recruitment, warfare, weapons etc., of the Sikh forces at that time.

Jassa Singh being a great organiser, the first thing he did was to ensure that the guerilla Sikh forces were not starved of the supply of more and more volunteers. It is said that in order to ensure this, he would tour the villages in the Punjab to inspire the locals about the sacred mission of the Khalsa and in the process would administer *pahul* to as many *sehajdhari* Sikhs and others as would offer to work whole-heartedly for the cause. In the process he would set up *jatha-bandi* centres in the villages so as to ensure regular supplies of men and materials required to sustain the movement for a long time.

In this respect it will be necessary to dispel another wrong impression from our minds that only the *keshadhari* Sikhs were recruited in the forces of the Sikh Sardars. It was, in fact, not so. We have got this impression from the fact that of late the term Sikh, has come to mean only a *keshadhari* Sikh. In fact,

no such distinction was possible in the early decades of the eighteenth century, when sufficient number of *sehajdharis* had not as yet taken the *pahul* as it was not forced upon any one. This fact is also clear from the contemporary Mughal, Maratha and Rajput documents in which the Sikhs who had taken arms against the State are mentioned by the more popular name of *Nanak Prastan* or the *Nanak Panthis*.⁴⁵ For the *keshadharis*, the term *Khalsa* was occasionally used.

The author of 'Jassa Singh Binod' even refers to the fact that Sardar Jassa Singh Ahluwalia had himself invited the Dogra and Gorkha soldiers to join him to lead an assault on the famous fortress of Khawas Khan, named after one of the commanders of Emperor Jehangir. As early as 1757, we also get references to the employment of foot soldiers, who may have been used for laying the siege or other guard duties. All of them may not be *keshadhari* Sikhs, who preferred to be cavalry men. In 1762, Jassa Singh had sent Mahabat Khan Pathan with Prem Singh of Roorki to subdue Kotla. Here the *chooliahs* presented themselves and were recruited in Jassa Singh's forces.⁴⁶

Jassa Singh Ramgarhia is also known to have at one time as many as 400 *sehajdharis* in his personal contingent. The same would apply to the forces of Ala Singh of Patiala and to other Phulkian Chiefs who had been the holders of jagirs and *zamindari* rights from the Mughal rulers.⁴⁷

Actually the impression about the non-recruitment of other than the *keshadharis* amongst the volunteer corps of the Dal

45. For example most of the volunteers who fought in the battles of Bhangani & Chamkaur on the side of Guru Gobind Singh had not necessarily taken the *pahul*. Even the maternal uncle of Guru Gobind Singh, Bhai Kirpal and many others were *sehajdhari* Sikhs. According to the news given in the 'Akhbarat-i-Durbar-i-Mualla' about the forces with Banda Bairagi all communities including Muslims in large numbers had joined him.

46. 'Jassa Singh Binod,' F. 29.

47. The use of term 'Sikh' army or 'Khalsa' army for the forces of Maharaja Ranjit Singh had also similarly created an impression as if the entire army of the Maharaja was composed exclusively of *keshadhari* Sikhs, although roughly out of a force of nearly 50,000, not less than 15 to 20,000 were Dogras, Khatris, Purbia Hindus, Muhammadans, Gorkhas and Pathans.

Khalsa mainly arose from the misconception about the use of the terms 'Sikh' and the 'Khalsa'. These terms were used because those who led the movement were Sikh Chiefs who were certainly all *keshadharis*.⁴⁸

Most of the Indian Chiefs depended upon the European suppliers. One thing was certain that although by about 1764 A.D. or so, all major Sikh Misls had set up their own foundries for the manufacture of small arms, but muskets, gunpowder, special type of shields and swords had to be arranged from outside. Bihar then produced the best type of saltpetre for which the English East India Company had obtained almost a monopoly. So also must be the case with saddles of good quality. The trade in saltpetre and other commodities between the Indian mainland and the North-Western region and beyond with the countries in West Asia, was mostly handled by Rajastani Banias, Hindu traders of Multan, Mithankot and Amarkot. As the two direct trade routes through Punjab had become inoperative, the Sikh Misdars too had to import these supplies from the interior of Hindustan through the Delhi-Bhiwani or the Jaipur-Hissar routes; this aspect should also be looked into in greater detail than done hitherto.

In this connection a good beginning has since been made by the exposure of the papers and trade accounts of the famous Bania family of Churu in Rajasthan.⁴⁹

In the context of the issues already discussed, Jassa Singh Ahluwalia emerges to be a man of great metals and a person who was fit enough to lead the Punjab during the most crucial period in its history. He was as much tall in physical stature as he was in statesmanship. He was as prominent and respected a missionary preaching the gospel of the Gurus, as he was a brave commander when leading the forces of the Dal Khalsa against the adversaries, which too he took as a part of his life's mission.

Just as the *sehajdhari* Sikhs liked to be baptized at the hands

48. Arjan Das Malik, *op. cit.*, p. 83, however, makes a categorical statement that conversion to Sikhism was a pre-condition for enrolment in the ranks of the Khalsa.

49. See also *Churu Mandal Ka Shodh Pooran Itihas* by Gobind Aggrawal published by Lok Sanskriti Shodh Sansthan, Churu, Rajasthan.

of Kapur Singh Faizulpuria, so did they by the hands of Jassa Singh Ahluwalia be they be the Sardars of high stature like Ala Singh and his son Amar Singh of Patiala or be they be the common place volunteers who were eager to join Sikh *jathas*. Jassa Singh would perform all these multifarious responsibilities with patience, grace and perseverance befitting his image in the public mind. He had a very soft corner for the poor and the downtrodden.

Secularism of Jassa Singh Ahluwalia is yet another aspect of his life which should be properly studied and highlighted particularly in view of the unfortunate trend in our times to make out as if the Hindus and Sikhs are two entirely different entities in our society or the point of view held out for a long time that the Sikhs of Dal Khalsa, were anti-Islam as a religion. There was no such thing. It was simply a resistance movement launched by the Sikhs during the eighteenth century, which was only anti-Afghan and anti-Mughal rulers. It was a movement against any type of fundamentalism as well as oppression of the weaker sections of society.⁵⁰

James Rennel who had compiled his Memoir on the Sikhs in 1788 makes a particular note to the effect that like the Hindus they (Sikhs) are perfectly tolerant in matters of faith.

The author of 'Jassa Singh Binod' time and again gives instances to prove the secularism of Jassa Singh. He notes again and again that almost after every victory in the battlefield, Jassa Singh would go on a pilgrimage to every holy place nearby, may that be a place of pilgrimage of the Sikhs, or Hindus or of the Muslims. It is said that after fighting his first battle with the forces of Ahmad Shah Abdali in 1748, Jassa Singh Ahluwalia accompanied by many Sardars escaped towards Shiwalik hills of Kangra where he paid a visit to the holy shrine of Jawala Mukhi Goddess and offered presents. Likewise after his successful campaign against the Governor of Multan and Nawab of Bhawalpur, Jassa Singh came to Hari Mandir Sahib where he held a *diwan* and *langar* in thanksgiving. Again after his campaign against the

50. This was a fundamental plus point in the tradition of the Khalsa. See also the reports about the rebellion of Banda Bairagi in the 'Akhabarat-i-Durbar-i-Mualla'.

butchers of Lahore, the same year, Jassa Singh went for the pilgrimage of Daroli Devi. After his victory over Adina Beg Khan in the battle of Jalandhar fought in 1753, Jassa Singh proceeded straight to Anandpur Sahib and celebrated 'Holla Mohalla' there.

During his expedition towards the Derajat during 1758-59, Jassa Singh Ahluwalia made it a point to visit the holy place of the Muslim Saint at Pak Pattan Sahib and bestowed Pak Pattan in *muafi* jagir on the *mutwali* of Baba Farid Sahib Ganj-i-Shakkar.

Again after killing Nawab Zain Khan, *faujdar* in the battle fought near Hoshiarpur, Jassa Singh again went on a pilgrimage to Anandpur Sahib, and conferred a *muafi* jagir of Rs. 25,000 as *ardas karai* on Singh Sahib Sodhi Prem Singh.

During his settlement of the territories around Kotla, Jassa Singh conferred 25 villages in *muafi* on Suba Singh Nihang and 5 villages on the Gangu Shahi *faqirs*.

Again after defeating Sa'adat Khan, Jassa Singh Ahluwalia went on a pilgrimage to the *gurdwaras* of Kiratpur Sahib and Anandpur Sahib and offered valuable presents to all the Sodhi priests. From there, Jassa Singh went on a pilgrimage to the temple of Naina Devi.

As a true Sikh, Jassa Singh was a very broad minded person even in his dealings with schismatic sections amongst his own co-religionists. This is clear from the manner he had come to the rescue of Baba Budh Singh Dhirmalia of Kartarpur Sahib *gurdwara* against Sa'adat Khan, the local *faujdar* of Jalandhar who wanted to wrest the town of Kartarpur which was held in jagir by the family of Bhai Budh Singh. Jassa Singh was then at Amritsar. Budh Singh wrote to him seeking the protection of the Dal Khalsa, from Sa'adat Khan. Jassa Singh, as a perfect democrat and a large hearted person, wished to help Budh Singh, but since the Khalsa *Panth* was opposed to the Dhirmalias from the very beginning, he thought it wise, to carry other Sikh Sardars with him. He, therefore, immediately summoned a meeting of the principal Sikh Sardars at Amritsar for consultation. Almost all of them advised Jassa Singh not to have any conflict with those descendants of Dhirmal, but the sagacious Jassa Singh prevailed upon them by telling that it was the tradition with the Khalsa to save everyone whosoever seeks protection from the *Panth* while in distress. He thus made the principal Sardars of the Dal Khalsa

to join their forces with him to save Bhai Budh Singh Dhirmalia from the clutches of the *faujdar* of Jalandhar Doab.

The case of Dewan Kaura Mal and Jawahar Singh Jat are other examples to prove how rationalist and broad-minded Jassa Singh Ahluwalia was in his day to day dealings.

It is well-known that Kaura Mal as the *faujdar* of the Governor of Lahore had sought the help of Jassa Singh Ahluwalia and the Dal Khalsa for leading a joint expedition against Shah Nawaz Khan whom Ahmad Shah Abdali had appointed as Governor of the *subah* of Multan on his behalf. Jassa Singh Ahluwalia when approached by Dewan Kaura Mal for help at once regarded it as a godsent opportunity to defeat the more dangerous and powerful an enemy in Ahmad Shah Abdali. Therefore, an agreement for joint operations was reached by both the parties. Dewan Kaura Mal who was a hardened smoker also sought the indulgence of Jassa Singh Ahluwalia for permitting him to smoke his *hugqa* in the presence of *keshadhari* Sikhs. Jassa Singh again prevailed upon the Sardars of the Dal Khalsa to allow the Dewan the indulgence to smoke his *hugqa* publically but to please the sentiments of the Sardars, he asked Kaura Mal to pay rupees five per *diem* to the Khalsa for the same. Kaura Mal readily agreed to this condition.

Veneration for the cow was another cardinal principle of the Sikh faith. It is said that in 1749 when Jassa Singh Ahluwalia was holding a grand *diwan* in the Hari Mandir Sahib to celebrate the victory of the Dal Khalsa over the Nawab of Bahawalpur, at that time a large number of Hindus of Lahore who were present in the *diwan*, complained to Jassa Singh that the incidence of cow slaughter at Lahore had increased so considerably that it was not to be tolerated any more. Moreover, the butchers were committing that sinful act in a defiant brazenness, because of the increase in the demand for beef on account of a large Afghan and Mughal forces then stationed there. This report infuriated Jassa Singh Ahluwalia so much that he declared in the open *diwan* that Khalsa ji must stop this sinful act on the part of the butchers. It is said that when some Sikh Sardars pointed out that to attack the butchers inside the four walls of the Lahore city was not an easy task, Jassa Singh told them that those who cared more for their lives than the lives of mother cow, need not join the assault, but

the Khalsa will put a stop to this evil. He accordingly ordered the despatch of a strong contingent of Sikh volunteers under the command of one Sardar Sham Singh to accomplish that task.

At the same time he gave clear instructions to the Sikh volunteers that, firstly, they should kill only the butchers and none else. Secondly, none should loot the property of the butchers, as they earned their wealth by foul and sinful acts.

Accordingly the forces of the Dal Khalsa were mobilized the same evening so that they could launch their attack at the early hours of the next morning on the residential quarters of the butchers situated in Kasab Pura Mohalla at Lahore. The author of 'Jassa Singh Binod' writes that the Sikhs had succeeded in entering Lahore by a clever stratagem and after having put almost all the butchers to the sword they made their escape from the city before the Mughal forces could be alerted to take action in defence of the butchers. It may be stated in this respect that by this bold action, the butchers all over the Punjab had been warned that the Khalsa would not permit them to do so in future at least in such a brazen-faced manner as they had started doing of late at Lahore.

But the more important point to be noted is the ban imposed by Jassa Singh Ahluwalia on the Khalsa for touching the money of the butchers, as he said that it was earned by them from a foul act as it was then called.⁵¹

Actually it may not be possible in a time bound programme like this to do full justice to the study of the multi-faced personality of Jassa Singh Ahluwalia. It will be better to leave the already well-known facts about nearly half a century of the stewardship of Jassa Singh in the affairs of the Sikh *Panth* and the Punjab politics, be these relate to the major battles fought by him and the Dal Khalsa against the Mughal and Afghan functionaries and forces between 1739-1783 or the release of the Hari Mandir Sahib from people like Bakshinda Khan in 1748, and ensuring of its

51. In all the treaties signed by Maharaja Ranjit Singh with the British as well as with Shah Shujah-ul-Mulk or Dost Muhamad Shah, then ruling in Afghanistan, there used to be a specific clause to ensure that all will respect the cow in the realm of the Maharaja. In those days none would even use the phrase "Kine Killing". It was instead referred to in the treaties and elsewhere as "*Kar-e-bad*" or an evil deed. This was infact a tradition set by Jassa Singh Ahluwalia.

proper management by the duly authorized persons or be it the release of nearly 2200 helpless Indian women from the clutches of the Afghan forces in November 1761 or even the great act of re-building the Hari Mandir Sahib in 1764 : these were the deeds which Jassa Singh Ahluwalia thought to be his matter of fact responsibilities.

But like all great men, Jassa Singh also peeped deeper and attempted many things, which any ordinary leader may not have done. The most important of these was his attempt to tackle the ticklish socio-economic factors which were afflicting the society at that time. One of these was the need to revive the almost dead economy of the Punjab, which at one time, used to be most vibrant.

It is regretted that so far the scholars have not paid the required attention to this aspect in the history of 18th century Punjab and practically no effort has been made to piece up the bits of documentary information which may be available on the socio-economic policies of Jassa Singh Ahluwalia and other Sikh Sardars of the period.

That Jassa Singh Ahluwalia was quite conscious about the need for the revival of the economy becomes clear from a number of decisions taken by him in this behalf.

In this connection it should not be a matter of surprise to any one that even in the selection of Fatehabad as his headquarters, Jassa Singh was quite conscious of the economic advantages of this town apart from the purely defensive consideration that the town was outflanked by the river Beas and the adjoining jungles or its being surrounded by the holy places like Goindwal Sahib, Khadur Sahib and Tarn Taran Sahib as well as the *khangahs* of at least six sufi saints in the vicinity. These things were no doubt ideal for a town which a saintly person and a Chief of the Dal Khalsa should have selected for his headquarters. But this apart, Fatehabad was also situated on an important trade route passing through the ferry near Goindwal.

It would also not be wrong to suggest that Jassa Singh and other Sardars of the Dal Khalsa were similarly keen to secure for them the other important trade routes which were still in use for trade between India and the West Asian countries. These were the Bhatner-Rewari-Sirsa route connecting India with Persia through Baluchistan and the Mithan Kot—Multan and Bahawalpur

side trade route while the direct Kabul-Lahore-Delhi route had almost become closed due to the uncertain political conditions.

The Hansi-Hissar-Rewari-Delhi route was also as vital for the commercial revival of the Punjab as it was then for the Rajputana States of Bikaner and Jaisalmer. In fact, both the sides could produce enough evidence to support their respective claims on the region of Bhatner as it was an ancient high-way connecting West Asia with Hindustan through this region. As this trade route also connected the towns of Fazilka, Abohar, Bhatinda and Sirsa on which the economy of the Punjab depended considerably from the early times; Jassa Singh Ahluwalia amply justified his claim on this region.⁵²

Similarly, it cannot be denied that it was one of the reasons of Jassa Singh Ahluwalia joining hands with Dewan Kaura Mal in the conquest of Multan, because both Multan and the town of Uch were known centres of trade for the Punjab. The author of 'Jassa Singh Binod', therefore, made a particular mention of the fact, that as Jassa Singh and the forces of Dal Khalsa reached the outskirts of the town of Uch, the local Arora and Khatri traders became quite apprehensive. But their apprehensions were soon removed when Jassa Singh Ahluwalia invited these traders to his camp and assured them that the Khalsa forces would rather protect their interests. Accordingly the traders collected one lakh of rupees by way of thanksgiving and gave this amount to the Dal Khalsa Chief.

Then take the case of the encouragement given by Jassa Singh Ahluwalia to all the Sikh Chiefs to build their respective *katras* where they could invite traders to help in the revival of the economy of the city to match up with that of Lahore. Jassa Singh is known to have specially invited Muslim and Hindu artisans who specialised in various handicrafts to come and reside at Amritsar. As such, Amritsar soon became a flourishing trade centre. In fact, many other modern townships and cities in the Punjab such as Gujranwala, Patiala, Phagwara, Ludhiana, Kot Kapura etc., owe their origin or development to the Sardars of the Dal Khalsa.

Revival of rural economy by the efforts of Jassa Singh

52. See also *History of Bikaner State* by Sohan Lal, 1890 (Urdu) : Article No 10, treaty signed on 21 March 1811 between the English East India Company's Government and the Maharaja of Bikaner.

Ahluwalia and other Sardars of the Dal Khalsa, is yet another field of study which needs immediate attention. It is a bit more technical and ticklish subject. We are grateful to Dr Hari Ram Gupta to have made a formal study of this subject to some extent. But the whole system of land ownership by the community and of the principle of alienation of land, within the community and the land revenue system in its entirety as it prevailed before the establishment of the Sikh Misls, and the impact of the changes introduced, if any, during the Misl period would require the sustained efforts of scholars who are experts in the line. We are grateful to the Guru Nanak Dev University for initiating more researches on this aspect of the history of this period.

We have been, so far, talking only about the plus points in the life and leadership of Jassa Singh Ahluwalia. But plus points alone about the lives of greatmen do not make history. Every leader, howsoever, great in stature and howsoever noble in his mission, does commit either some mistakes or leaves the task unfinished for a variety of reasons and circumstances. Jassa Singh's main failure in my view came, not from any imperfection of or a blot or blemish in his personal life or character. In fact, his personal life was blameless. So much so, that the tradition is still strong amongst the older families of Fatehabad, that when Jassa Singh lost his son from his first wife and there was no hope of her bearing another male child, Jassa Singh was very reluctant to go in for another wife. Even otherwise Jassa Singh was a very saintly person. He would strictly maintain his schedule of daily worship, wherever and in whatsoever situation he might be at his home or even on the battlefield. He was also known for his well-mannered and cultured daily conduct. He used to dress in the usual simple manner. He would wear only white dress and white *pagri*. But he was in the habit of changing his dress twice in the day. Having lived for some years amidst the more cultured society at Delhi and having learnt Urdu and Persian, along with Gurmukhi, he carried this tradition throughout his life. He was rather more often jeered at by his associates in the Punjab for conversing with them in Hindustani and not in the Punjabi language. All these things were his plus points.

His principal failure was that he could not really wield together all the components of the Sikh confederal theocratic system known as Misdari System into a stable workable and last-

ing institution of government. Perhaps it was too democratic a system to permit of a composite functioning.

History of the eighteenth century Punjab proves that if Jassa Singh had succeeded in carrying with him most of the Sikh Chiefs and smaller Sardars who constituted the Dal Khalsa, it was only due to his own lofty personality, tact and personal charisma. But even then the tendency of obstructive dissent remained so strong that very often than not even the principal Sardars and Misdars did not hesitate to lead their respective forces against the others of their own fraternity. During the late sixties of the eighteenth century this tendency of indulging in internecine warfare between the various Misls had become rather an order of the day, many a time forcing Jassa Singh Ahluwalia to lead his own forces to correct the erring party. In the Majha and Rachna Doab, the Bhangi, the Sukarchakia and the Kanahya Sardars are known to have fought bloody battles time and again. Jassa Singh had to lead his own forces against the Bhangis and also against the Kanahyas and in favour of the Sukarchakia Sardars. In the Jalandhar Doab, the territories of which fell to the lot of Jassa Singh Ahluwalia and Jassa Singh Ramgarhia, there were many bloody clashes between the two. So also not all the major and minor Sardars of the other side of the Sutlej were always at peace with one and another and Jassa Singh's forces were seen taking part against one or the other erring party. The pity is that these disputes between the Sikh Misdars would arise more often than not over the question of dividing of either the newly acquired or conquered territories, or the non-fulfilment of the agreement already reached between them about the sharing of the taxes or levies on the land. Each party in this contest would not even grudge the looting of the property of the peaceable inhabitants of the area. The soldiers of each side would be asked to destroy the crops and demolish the dwellings of the enemy side, thus, very often transgressing even the universally accepted norms of warfare. It is an open secret that the faction of Sikh Sardars on the side of Jassa Singh Ramgarhia had during the operations of the Dal Khalsa in Delhi imposed and collected unilaterally a fine of rupees two lakh from Dewan Ram Kishan, the *vakil* of the Maharaja of Jaipur in Delhi for sparing the locality of Jai Singh Pura in Delhi and there would have been an armed clash between the two factions on the question of sharing of this booty had not Jassa Singh

Ahluwalia restrained his own Sardars by holding a meeting of the two sides in the presence of the *Granth Sahib*.⁵³

But in spite of this temporary patch up there are reports about the fact that both these factions were trying to deceive and outwit each other to be the first to reach the Red Fort, the palace of the unfortunate Shah Alam.⁵⁴

This last episode which took place between the two factions of the Dal Khalsa inside the Red Fort, when swords were drawn to prevent Jassa Singh Ahluwalia being formally seated upon the then namesake throne of the Great Mughals, had so much shattered his faith in the future of Dal Khalsa that he considered this to be the greatest defeat of his life's mission and he had taken this fact so much to his heart that thereafter, Jassa Singh Ahluwalia was never seen in his usual buoyant mood.

Actually Jassa Singh Ahluwalia was never the same carefree dare-devil person after the Red Fort incident of March 1783 and therefore, that shock may be the real cause of his death on 17 October, the same year on his way from Fatehabad to Badala though colic caused by eating of water-melon may have been an immediate cause. This is how, Jassa Singh's biographer Ram Sukh Rao makes a graphic description of the last moments of Jassa Singh Ahluwalia as below :

“That Jassa Singh Ahluwalia was near the village of Badala on the way from Fatehabad to Amritsar where he was proceeding to join the *Sangat* for the celebration of Diwali festival, when he ate a water-melon. It suddenly caused him so much pain in the stomach that the Sardar who was known for his great forbearance began to reel under the pain. He ordered a *palki* to be brought for him. But after travelling in the *palki* for one *ghari* he felt that his end was near, so he ordered that he be taken out of the *palki* and be made to lie on the ground as the final moment of his life had come. The traditional

53. Reports of the Jaipur Durbar, Rajasthan State Archives, Bikaner. The entire area of the old Raisina and the present Connaught Place and Jantar Mantar were called Jai Singh Pura. Swai Jai Singh had in fact as many as 22 localities belonging to the house of Jaipur right from Kabul in Afghanistan upto Benaras in India. For details please refer to the Introduction to the National Register of Kapad Dawara Records, Vol I issued by the National Archives of India.

54. Reports of Jaipur Darbar, *op. cit.*

sankalp was made by him for donations to the Brahmans, and the poor and he was given the *darshan* of *Salig Ram—Ganga-jal* or holy water from the river Ganges was poured in his mouth and the Brahmans were reciting the *Ved mantras*. Baba ji himself was reciting the *Sukhmani*. Soon after this he became unconscious but before that he had given instructions that his dead body might not be taken back to Fatchabad, but to Sri Amritsar Sahib.”

Be as it may, but with the death of Jassa Singh Ahluwalia the experiment of establishing the sovereignty of the conceptual Khalsa had definitely failed to materialise and history had to wait for a bolder Sikh than Jassa Singh Ahluwalia to formally declare it dead. He was Singh Sahib Ranjit Singh who having already learnt the lesson from the early death of his grandfather and father as a result of the inter Misl-rivalary finally declared in 1809 that the government through Gurmata was not practicable.

But there should be nothing to regret from this failure of Jassa Singh Ahluwalia. Secondly, it must be understood that a historical event or situation occurs as a result of a large number of forces and factors and many traditions and imbalances in the society. It is always such a situation of crisis that bold principles of social behaviour are formulated by thinkers, seers and philosophers and some one always comes forward to put into practice these new thoughts and new principles so enunciated. Jassa Singh Ahluwalia was one of those leading statesmen and leaders of the world in whose fate it was to experiment boldly, calmly and with determination with a new system of government “of all and for all” of which the main inspiration had come from the teachings of the Sikh Gurus themselves.

Moreover, if we look around the 18th century situation, we find that it was a century of great socio-political changes, a century which saw the birth of the concept of a nation State, vis-a-vis a theological sovereign having sway over many nation States. The 18th century had also witnessed the first experiment of setting up a government of the commune for the commune in France and also its early collapse resulting in the emergence of an Imperial France under Napoleon Bonaparte which was considered as a national necessity for France. In Punjab too the failure of the experiment of setting up a government of the Sarbat Khalsa led to almost this type of thinking, which led to the emergence of the most centralised rule of Maharaja Ranjit

Singh in less than two decades of the failure of the experiment of the government by consensus almost in similar circumstances and in similar manner as had happened in France almost at the same time.

It may, therefore, be worthwhile to close this series of lectures by quoting a British settlement officer of Jalandhar who while working at the settlement report of the Jalandhar Doab in the early years of the 20th century felt inspired by the personality of Jassa Singh Ahluwalia as the founder of the Kapurthala State. He writes :

Jassa Singh was respected as much for his saintly and orthodox qualities, as for his military abilities which were remarkable. Raja Amar Singh of Patiala and many other Sikh Chiefs of renown were proud to accept *Pahul* from his hands; and no matter of religious importance came up for discussion concerning which his opinion was not asked and generally followed. In short he did more than any contemporary Sikh to consolidate the power of the Khalsa; and his death was a calamity which might have seriously affected the future of the new faith had not the gap been speedily filled up, by a leader still more able, though not more brave and beloved, the redoubtable Maharaja Ranjit Singh.

For his saintly qualities and his selfless services to the *Panth*, Jassa Singh Ahluwalia received the highest honour which the Sikh *Panth* had bestowed only on Baba Attal, the son of Guru Hargobind, and later on Nawab Kapur Singh Faizalpuria, the founder of the Dal Khalsa and the mentor of Jassa Singh Ahluwalia. All these three have received this singular distinction that their *smadhis* were built within the complex of the Hari Mandir Sahib in close proximity of one another, and even when the other *smadhis* and idols were removed from within the complex as a result of Gurdwara Reform Movement of 1919-1925, these three *smadhis* have been spared and these continue to be looked with the highest degree of veneration and respect by all the Sikhs and other devotees. Such was the personality of Jassa Singh Ahluwalia.*

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